



NABO News

The Magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners
Issue 5 Winter 2025



Transiting Trent Falls
Anderton Boat Lift delays
Cruising the Mon & Brec
Historic milestone for the
Cotswold Canals Trust



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NABO News

The magazine of the National Association of Boat Owners

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Next NABO News copy date

Articles, letters, photos and cartoons are most welcome. Please email your contributions to nabonews@nabo.org.uk or post to the Editor by 10th January 2026.

NABO Calendar 2025

The next edition will have the dates for 2026

Cover photo

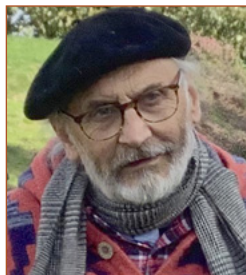
Wolverhampton 21 in very late Autumn colours. Please email your photos for the front cover of NABO News to the Editor, as JPG, ideally portrait with a file size of 5MB or larger.



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I hesitate to use the 'C' word but Christmas is coming, we are well into Autumn as I write and at last the air has become a bit cooler, although we are still not seeing enough rain to top up the reservoirs, as can be seen from the latest statistics.

Traffic along the Shropshire Union is beginning to reduce in numbers, there's still a surprisingly large number of hire boats apart from the day boats that pretty much run all year.

Winter musings

Editor **John Sadler**

We had a long weekend taking in a pub meal and a few drinks in the last dry weekend, weatherwise. The multi fuel stove was fired for the first time although after a few minutes the swan hatch needed to be open. After that experience we stuck to the more controllable diesel heating. We have promised ourselves a bit more cruising this winter so hopefully the rain we desperately need will fall at night.

I've noticed that a few images of narrowboats in distress have been posted on social media that are contrary to the laws of physics. I'm guessing that AI had a hand in generating these implausible situations. The first question we now have to ask, on seeing boats in unlikely positions is 'is it real or fake?'. With the increasing capacity of software to

generate any image or story I'm not too sure how we will cope, but like adverts that seem to be too good to be true we will learn to judge. When the long awaited new app arrives for reporting episodes on the cut, CRT will have to apply some sort of vetting to determine the source of the images. There's always someone willing to corrupt an otherwise good plan.

A welcome should be extended to Campbell Rob as the new CEO of CRT, and a goodbye to Richard Parry whose efforts have kept the charity going from its inception. Personally I'm sad to see Anne retiring from NABO Chair, her efforts were always in support of all boaters but I do know the strain that it puts on a small team.

Our forthcoming AGM will provide answers to who will form the next council and possibly set new objectives for the year.

Looking forward to the next and favourite part of the winter, creating plans for cruising in the better weather. I'm sure a lot more contingency will feature after this year, and the favourite logic that figures in every coding language: if-then-else will play a big part.

There are parts of the network that I've still not seen and would like to, before I get too old and infirm. The Kennet and Avon down to Bath and one of the cross Pennine routes are both still on the agenda although not in the same year

The Boater's App development

The app has had a slow start due to the complex technical specification, but is on track for delivery in 2026. Although no detailed proposal or specification has been made public, CRT claim to have made significant progress on the procurement process. Vendor evaluations are complete, and they are now finalising contractual agreements to move toward implementation.

The next steps include finalising the vendor contract and scheduling onboarding meetings with the supplier. CRT aim to take them out boating, so they can see firsthand what unique challenges the waterways present to the project.

If anyone is prepared to volunteer to test the app as part of its development, please could they register their interest via this form: forms.office.com/e/21tSYBbwAQ

Passing on the baton

Chair **Anne Husar**

Today's the day, 27th October, queues of boats have built up on parts of the UK's canal system ready for release. After months of being caught up in 'low water' canal closures following a year of feast and famine rainfall, some locks will have their padlocks removed for a few days and hours. Then closed again, what a year.

Today's also the day for me to stop prevaricating and get on with this column. It's a difficult write as I have decided it's time for another boater to take over the chair of NABO. Two years is enough I feel of trying hard to work enthusiastically and conscientiously with monopolistic navigation authorities. It's not always a rewarding task but I want to mention a couple of positives.

Firstly the on-going development and growth of the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign which NABO can rightly claim to have initiated when Mike Rodd was chair. Its enthusiastic banner adorned boats have featured all over the inland waterways, reaching the media news and, more importantly, noted by MP's. Government currently are choosing to remain intransigent, the fight continues.

Secondly, looking back over two years of Q&As from NABO's regular meetings with CRT's Matthew Symonds, three themes among the many disparate items recur: unplanned stoppages, facilities and vegetation. They could all be seen as boaters expressing their continuing feeling they are not getting licence value for money and this fed in to the poor Boater Satisfaction survey results. But then, out of the blue, Matthew wanted to talk to us again.

He had listened and come up with the Better Boating Plan, what did we think of it? It was at last an acknowledgement that improvements had to be made and a year on, there are statistics to show that this plan is helping.

So, to my successor, I suspect your list of problems that boaters have asked you to bring up with CRT at these regular meetings might not become any shorter than mine ever did but I'm sure you will continue to hold all the navigation authorities' feet to the fire. It has become what is expected from NABO!

Finally, with thanks to NABO Council for their unwavering support and guidance, it's been a privilege.



A NABO appeal for help!

nabo.org.uk/registration

NABO is fighting battles on numerous fronts trying to keep the canal network open for as many people as possible. We are involved in discussions with CRT and EA as well as other bodies affecting the operation and continuation of navigable waterways. Sometimes we have to travel to meetings in person (expenses provided) but mostly meetings are on-line. More members would be greatly appreciated.

Full Member

This is the primary membership that covers one Full Voting Member for which the only qualification is that you are the owner of any sort of boat capable of use on the inland canals, rivers or Broads of the UK. Any or all part owners in a boat-share or syndicate scheme may also join as Single Members with individual voting rights.

Memberships are available, even to non boat owners, that appreciate the work we do in preserving access to the canal network for all.





Confusion of Winter Moorings

By Andy Williams

Have the rules for winter moorings changed, is it poor signage and explanations or is CRT enforcing a rule change?

At Ellesmere on the Arm there's a regular winter mooring. There's one this year. There have been a couple of local posts observing that the mooring on the Arm is almost empty. I was there today. They are right. Interestingly the empty section is where the new winter mooring signage had been put in.

There's something different about the 2025 signs.

Here is the link to the FAQ page for winter moorings which is expanded and also changed, or so it seems; canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/moorings/winter-moorings/winter-moorings-faqs-2025-2026

It says there "Will I still be able to moor at visitor moorings this winter? Yes. Where a winter mooring is part of

a visitor mooring site, approximately 50% of the site will be winter moorings and the other half of the site will still be available throughout the

winter period for visitors to moor for the advertised stay time". Note the phrase "*will be available*". What does that mean? Previously it was indicated that if there was a space any boater could moor in 'winter' zones providing nobody with a paid up winter permit needed it. That is now not said explicitly (so far as I have read). Prior to 2025 the signs also gave the same indication. This year they have changed and they now say "*These moorings will be used for winter mooring permit holders*". What does "*used*" mean? Previously it **didn't** mean blocked or reserved.

Prior to this winter season the FAQ indicated that Winter moorings operate as visitor mooring, as usual, in that while some boaters have paid to moor over the winter, if there is a space available anyone, paying guests or otherwise, can stop there for the normal maximum limit. At Ellesmere Arm that would be at least 3 days (I'm not clear whether that would change to 14 in the winter, it doesn't say '*All Year*'). It appears that boaters are reading these signs as stating that the moorings are now reserved. I don't believe that is correct, have the rules changed or is this extremely bad and confused signage?



Meeting Reports

At Strawberry Island

The delightfully named island that always makes me think of summer and strawberry fool

Reports from Duncan Wright (DW) and comments by Nick Roberts (NR) at a meeting with representatives from CRT and Network Rail

DW There was an update from Steve Smith (CRT) regarding the situation in Yorkshire and the Northeast. This broadly parallels with the national picture, though he did say that the northern canals had more or less all opened up now and were in a better position than some of the southern waterways. He gave an update on the local Better Boating dashboard, highlighting the learning from the 2025 drought and gave a vague and fairly slim outline of what is planned for 2026, 8 lock maintenance closures were mentioned, though no dates or timescales.

The meeting welcomed Alex Faulkner and Simon Phillips from Network Rail, who came to discuss the Keadby sliding drawbridge.

Alex is the Route Engineer-Structures for the East of England, with responsibility for 20,000 assets, bridges, tunnels etc.

Simon is the Senior Asset Engineer for the East of England, and is responsible for 4 movable bridges, Selby, Hull, Goole and of course Keadby.

NR I salute the Network Rail guys for even coming, but they really didn't have much 'positive' to say. They apologised for the 'inconvenience' caused to boaters over the last two years—and declared that (despite the bridge being closed for the previous 2 weeks)—things “are getting better” although I suggested otherwise!

DW They stated that the Keadby line is the busiest freight corridor in the country, feeding three major power stations: Drax, Eggborough and West Burton. They appeared to be unaware that two of these power stations have actually been demolished and now only Drax remains.

In site surveys created four years ago it was noted that the offside supporting wall at Keadby was starting to collapse at the northeast corner leading to a ~15mm dip in the railway line joints at the bridge. In 2024 major remedial works costing £2.5m were carried out, though as we know these have been less than successful.

In 2025 an additional £400k has been spent

on the sliding drawbridge (5% of the budget allocated to 7000 assets), they plan to spend an additional £200k over the next two years improving control and monitoring, and are learning all the time what is important in keeping the bridge working and what stops it.

As much of the structure as possible has been painted white, resulting in a 10°C drop in observed temperatures.

It was also stated that with the new control and monitoring systems the rails have to align by less than 2mm otherwise rail traffic is stopped. The bridge is vulnerable to both temperature changes and vibration. Anyone who has tried to sleep on a boat near the bridge knows that vibration is an issue...

They admitted that canal traffic has priority, and stated several times that safety is their number one priority. If the <2mm tolerance is not met and safety is highest priority, why do they not open the bridge to canal traffic unaffected by the rail misalignment?

NR The importance of this route into the Yorkshire North East area was then explained 'from the floor', along with how it had contributed to the 25% drop in river traffic in 2024, and how this year's damage to numbers had again been significant after their June closure.

The meeting wrapped up with a Q&A session.

DW Problems caused by the lack of a traffic light system to let boaters know when it is safe to proceed, especially at night were highlighted. One incident causing damage to a boat was noted when the bridge closed mid transit.

The lack of adequate lighting making getting on and off boats safely was brought up, since most summer transits occur at night.

One question, about penalty payments from Network Rail for the non functional sliding drawbridge, was asked. It concerned using said funds for firstly clearing silt build up at Keadby lock for those boats having to lock out at low water in order to transit to Goole via Trent Falls. Secondly for CRT to use these penalty payments to cover the costs of locking out of Goole and paying for a pilot for the Trent Falls passage. Sean McGinley fielded this question and was very uncoopera-

Meeting Reports

tive, stating that this money goes into a national pot for national benefit.

NR The critical question of “how will the bridge perform next year” was rather swept aside with a “it should be better than this year” reply. Can they guarantee no ‘month long’ closures?... “they shouldn’t happen”.

Why have these last two weeks’ closures been so poorly communicated? Shaun McGinley volunteered that that was down to CRT... “and we should do better”.

My personal take... I heard nothing that suggests the bridge will be any more reliable next year than this.

The closures of the toilet facilities at the 4 tidal locks was briefly raised (concerns about the seagoing cruisers not having sanitary tanks so discharging to the canals was specifically raised). The response was that the decision to close was

based on a Customer Survey that said only x% (small number!) of boats don’t have showers and toilets so the decision to close these facilities was based on customer feedback and was across the system. Pointing out that most of the boats that don’t have sanitary tanks or showers are potentially the big seagoing cruisers of the Trent fell on deaf ears.

A disappointing — but pretty much as expected meeting?

Try the Trent group

The possible creation of a way to safely guide or pilot inexperienced boats between Keadby and Goole via Trentfalls in the event of further closures of the bridge was discussed by the ‘Try The Trent’ group, after the formal CRT meeting closed.



BSS Technical Forum

On the 14th October Mike Rodd attended a regular meeting of the Boat Safety Scheme’s Technical Forum, held at Hatton locks. As always a very interesting meeting with follow-ups on various appeals etc. and updates to some BSS processes.

It was very evident that work between meetings was being well managed with full forum member involvement, and delays avoided. It was also reported that work on Examination Checking Procedures (ECPs) for non-private working boats had started.

Of particular interest was an extensive discussion on the consequences of the increasing higher voltages and currents, both AC and DC, especially on new, or being upgraded, boats. Here the work being undertaken by the relevant ISO groups was reported on and it is clear that over the next few years, much of the necessary

consequences will emerge and will need to be taken on board by the Boat Safety Scheme. As a result the BSS is setting up a working group which will first meet in December this year. This will of course also take on board issues relating to lithium batteries etc. It was reported though, that despite some reports on claimed incidents related to failures in lithium based systems, most of these are wrong and in fact there are indeed few serious problems — just lots of ill-informed reports.

Time was also given to extensively discussing work being undertaken aimed at moving all BSS inspection work to be done online via an inspectors’ online laptop or mobile. Whilst a seemingly obvious change, there are many, many issues to be resolved given that BSS inspectors will be working and reporting essentially immediately and online.

CRT's Better Boating plan

By Sue Tonious

Well, it was a great idea and filled many of us with hope for the future of canals for navigation but great ideas do not fill reservoirs, dredge canals or repair infrastructure.

The most notable changes recently seem to be the controversial removal of waste disposal sites and the selective closure of Customer Service Facilities (CSFs), neither of which can be described to lead to better boating.

There has been little to no communication with users as boaters are now called, who provide a large income to the Trust. This will lead to a further downgrade of satisfaction. Although the figures put out by CRT show an improvement in customer satisfaction none of the boating community that I've talked to recently have confirmed that. Maybe we could have some detail on how the statistical information was collected. Cuts to facilities while increasing the license and mooring fees will not encourage support from any sector of the floating customer base.

Comments from our members question why there has not been an earlier response to the recycling requirements now introduced by many councils. If Biffa cannot fulfil the contract are there any other companies that could, maybe local councils could tender? Some sites do not have the room for extra bins or suitable access for more vehicles to collect, but as caretaker of 2000 miles of canals it shouldn't be too difficult to find new sites. However, the easiest option is just to remove the more difficult sites. There are

examples of CRT leisure moorings being taken up because they have local facilities of water, elsan and rubbish disposal, removals are taking place with no consultation and little or no notice. Any mention of moorer dissatisfaction as a result is treated with contemptuous responses; if you don't like it move to a different mooring.

The rationale for closure doesn't seem to take in risk factors. If there are other facilities locally they might only be accessible through a flight of locks, which is time consuming and water wasting at best or impossible if there's a temporary repair closure, low water issues, or they are frozen up.

There seems to be an attitude problem, if it's too much trouble, close it. A 'can do' approach to problem solving seems to be completely missing. Repair times are not consistent. The increasing number of facility removals are putting distances in excess of CRT's current CSF policy.

CRT have estimated they will save millions by the rather sudden closures of many sites housing toilets and showers. Will these savings really be invested in improving what facilities are left? By producing a five year plan for these investments rather than a one year, does CRT hope instead that boaters will come to accept over time a new norm of reduced facilities and a correspondingly changed policy?

Leisure cruisers and liveaboards may be able to adapt but there are trading boats, especially the fuel boats, and others without facilities that will find their floating experience quite unpleasant.

Planning a transit around Trent Falls?

By **Brian Sharples**

With what is fast becoming a regular occurrence, the closure of the Vazon Sliding Rail Bridge, access to and from the Trent is becoming ever more unreliable. Be it mechanical failure or during the summer months, when the temperature required for bridge operation has been too high for it to operate, even throughout the night.

This is leaving boaters looking for other options if they are wanting to head North/South. In 2025 the other three options of getting over the Pennines, Rochdale Canal, Huddersfield Narrow Canal, and the Leeds Liverpool Canal were all closed due to water shortages. That left the only other option, transit around Trent Falls.

Try The Trent Facebook group is looking at the feasibility of going around Trent Falls without the need to drop an anchor. The aim

is to produce a document that will provide a skipper with as much information as possible, in order to make an informed decision on the possibilities of such a transit. However, if you have no experience of travelling in tidal waters or you have never made the transit before then do not attempt the transit by yourself. Consider employing one of the river guides to take you around Apex Light. They will come aboard your boat and provide you with the knowledge and experience required.

Since the document will be focusing on making a transit around Apex Light, Trent Falls without anchoring, it will limit the times available for suitable passage, compared with conditions that a river guide may consider.

The document will show the reader how to calculate their arrival time at Apex Light, to coincide with the time when the tide turns, (first

Photo: Mick Hurst





Photo: Brian Sharples

flood). At this time, a skipper would be able, having come down one of the two rivers on the outgoing tide, to go up the other on an incoming tide.

Leaving Ocean Lock, Goole: By the very nature of arriving at Apex Light, to coincide with first flood, you will be on the rivers at the time of Low Water. The document will also look at the calculations to determine whether there will be sufficient depth of water to allow transit, dependent on the draft of your boat. Weather conditions will also be looked at and the difficulties wind over tide may present to a boater, along with the wind speeds that would be considered unadvisable to proceed.

Would timings, into or out of Goole and Keadby locks be suitable for arriving at Apex Light at first flood? Finally, it will look at the transit itself and things to look out for en route.

Once the document has been completed it will be 'sanity checked' by those who have a good working knowledge of the Trent and the tides. Selected boaters with varying degrees of knowledge will then be asked to plan a fictional passage using the information contained to arrive at a conclusion whether it would have been safe to set off on that journey with the knowledge given.

Finally, once we know we have a feasible working document it is our intentions to hold meetings with CRT and Associated British Ports (ABP) to obtain their buy-in and if possible, their endorsement of the document. If we can get that endorsement, we will look to publish it through CRT, through our own Facebook page and with any other interested group.

Our aim is to have the document ready and evaluated before the start of next year's busier boating time.

An isolated gem of a canal

The Monmouth & Brecon Canal

Peter Fellows has his first visit to this Welsh waterway

After 20 years in a shared narrowboat group, Terry Little and I sold our respective shareholdings and decided to explore some of the outlying canals that we'd been unable to visit in the group.

The 35-mile Mon & Brecon was an obvious choice. So with some of Terry's family, Jemima and Martin, we hired a 55-foot 6-berth narrowboat from Cambrian Cruisers to explore this isolated rural canal.

take up to 90% of the water needed to feed the canal from the River Usk at Newton Weir in Brecon. The licence was refused by Natural Resources Wales because low water levels were threatening the ecology of the river, a designated special area of conservation. This followed an exceptionally dry winter and spring (almost unheard of in Wales!) with 40% less rainfall than a typical year. The effect on the hire companies was immediate and dramatic, with new bookings flatlining and many existing bookings cancelled by holidaymakers worried that they wouldn't be able to cruise the canal.

Closure was averted by Glandŵr Cymru agreeing a new commercial arrangement with Dŵr Cymru (Welsh Water). A Welsh Water spokesperson said: "The River Usk is one of the primary sources of drinking water to around 250,000 customers and is one of our least drought-resilient supply areas with limited water resource to deal with the impacts of climate change and population growth. In April, we reached an agreement to support the canal with releases of water from Usk Reservoir. This reduces the amount available for public water supply so we are pumping water from the River Tywi to ensure there is no risk to our customer supply. This is expensive and should not be paid for by our customers, so we have agreed to provide it at cost to CRT." The arrangement came with a significant investment by the Trust, estimated at up to £100,000 per week¹. However, given the subsequent four-month drought and

Temporary gate repairs and towpath mowing

All photos: Peter Fellows



In the Spring, a few weeks after we'd made the booking, the national news media began reporting the possible closure of the canal due to lack of water, with headlines such as 'The beautiful Welsh canal that's fighting closure' and 'Historic canal facing 'precarious future'.

Glandŵr Cymru (CRT in Wales) requires an abstraction licence to

The Mon & Brec

Hire companies

ABC, Beacon Park
Narrowboats, Cambrian
Cruisers, Castle
Narrowboats, Country
Craft Narrowboats, Road
House Narrowboats.

Maximum boat dimensions

Length	16.76m	55ft
Width	2.59m	8' 5"
Draught	0.75m	2' 6"
Headroom	1.8m	5' 9"

been busy with trimmers and mowing machines.

However, it was not all 'plain-sailing'; along large stretches of the waterway overgrown offside bushes restrict manoeuvring space when meeting oncoming boats. But the main issue was the lack of water depth, especially south of Llangattock. The central channel was sufficiently deep, but either side of that risked running aground—often a couple of metres from the bank. Similarly, it was not possible to pull



Brecon basin

alongside for a lunch stop other than at designated visitor moorings. The lack of depth also restricted cruising speed to less than 2mph, although having such a scenically beautiful canal and a week to travel around 60 miles, this was an entirely acceptable leisurely pace. Clearly a substantial investment in dredging is long overdue.

Moorings at Brynich aqueduct

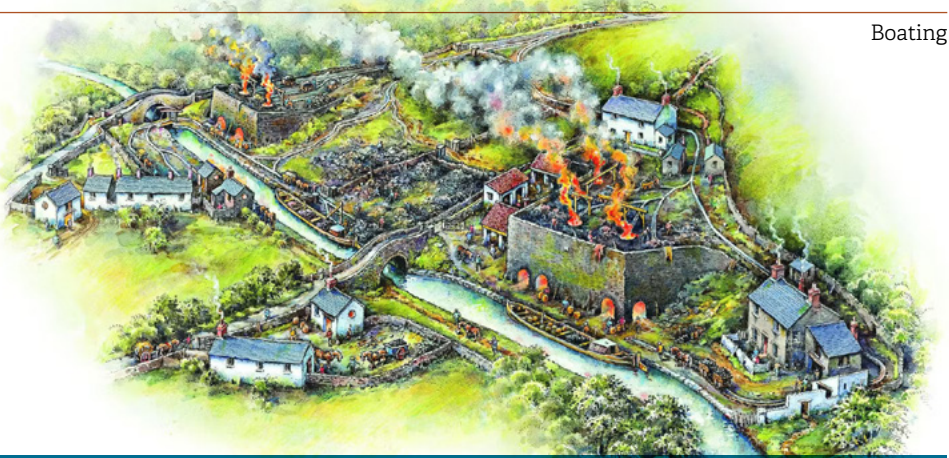


Overall, the canal has a unique character, with perhaps the most attractive section between Llangattock and Llanellan, where it clings to a steep hillside around 100 metres above the Usk valley.

Here, it passes through ancient oak and beech woodlands, with views of Abergavenny and the more distant peaks of the Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons). Three historic limekilns, restored with financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Brecon Beacons Trust, are a reminder of the canal's industrial past.

We winded beyond Goitre Wharf and returned to visit the northern terminus at Brecon.

En route, we met NABO's Southern and Welsh Waters rep., Mike Rodd and his wife, Sue, on board at their home mooring. We stopped overnight at the Brynich aqueduct over the River Usk and shared some excellent food at the nearby pub in Groesffordd. Brecon's lovely little basin, adjacent to the theatre and attractive cottages, is close to the town's amenities. Image Mon & Brec 7 bench map caption Carved canal route on a bench The final day was a short cruise back to the hire base, completing our week on this charmingly characterful rural Welsh waterway.



A potted history of the Mon & Brecon

The canal is actually two separate canals and a branch line: the Monmouthshire—partly restored and partially navigable; the Brecknockshire & Abergavenny—fully navigable, and the Crumlin Branch—derelict.

The Brecknockshire & Abergavenny was originally called the Abergavenny Canal, but people in Brecon wanted lower prices for their coal, so 'Brecknockshire' was added to the title. Engineer, Thomas Dadford Junior, recommended a line thirty-three miles long with six locks and the canal received its Act of Parliament in 1793.

Work started in 1794 on three tramways to connect business up in the hills and remote valleys to the canal, but it was another three years before any work began on the waterway. It reached Brecon in 1800 and Govilon by 1804, when the money ran out. Nineteen years after receiving its Act it finally reached the Monmouthshire Canal at Pontymoile in 1812, joining the through-route to Newport wharfs. But it was difficult and costly to build: much of the route was through inaccessible dense woodland on a contoured ledge half-way up a mountainside of the Usk Valley, requiring many small aqueducts and embankments. The total cost was around £200,000.

The main cargoes were coal, limestone, agricultural lime and general goods. After the link, iron products were moved from Llanelly and Llanfoist to Newport. At its height there were sixty trading boats, each 64ft 9in long and 8ft 9in wide, with a maximum load of 25 tons. By the 1860s, railways had taken much of the coal trade, the iron and steel works had moved nearer the coast, and lime-kilns were no longer in use. As most of the tonnage disappeared, the canal lost the main reasons for its existence. Maintenance costs became far higher than income and the canal slowly became derelict while still in use. In 1865 the entire canal was sold to the Monmouthshire Railway & Canal Co. for £61,000. Shorter, local journeys continued until the last commercial carriage at Llangynidr in 1933 and the whole canal was officially abandoned in 1962.

Restoration of the Brecknockshire & Abergavenny section began over the next few years, with funding from the Brecon Beacons National Park, and in 1973 the canal was fully reopened from Pontypool to Brecon.

Adapted from 'Canal Routes website, Monmouthshire and Brecon Brecknock and Abergavenny' at canalroutes.net/Monmouthshire-and-Brecon-Canal.html#history

A scientific approach to emissions

How are we going to get to net zero? Part II

David Fletcher examines possibilities for electric boating.

Net zero is the plan to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to a point where what small emissions we do make are offset by 'other means', so the balance is zero.

We know that the Department for Transport (DfT) are looking at inland waterways, with the obvious political push to make all boats fully electric. But is that possible with the current technology, and what should we do to manage this? We suspect that the boating life style is low carbon, but is that really true? And if we have to make changes, are these behavioural, higher cost of fuel, or based on perhaps expensive modifications to our boats.

This time I will look at hybrid and electrical propulsion, and 240V household systems. The press is full of them, the boat shows love them, but are they practical? The simple answer is yes, but they do come at a cost and have the same drawback as electrical vehicles, ie where is my next charge coming from?

The simplest all electric boat is an old fashioned house boat with a hook up, but as soon as the ropes are free, you have to take your power with you as battery, solar or a generator, or a combination. And they all cost money. We know quite a bit about narrow boats with electric motors, and there is good published data from narrow boat trials. The power to drive a boat at 4 mph is circa 5kw. So it is easy to work out how big the batteries need to be for

your days' cruise.

Your choice of speed is important, as if you need the extra power for river running, your batteries are going to need to be bigger. A common size is something like 5kwh capacity but many are bigger, and 48v is usual. You can fill your roof with a 2kw array of solar panels and it will help in the summer, but only help, not takeover. And will I get home tonight to hook up? So for pure electric drive, your requirements for speed and endurance make a very big difference in hardware and the cost.

We can all see this fits a day boat nicely, limited range, keep the speed down, come back to the same place every night, perfect. But for most of us this is not our style, so are you doing this? You are transferring the energy source from a diesel engine to a combination of the mains grid, solar or perhaps a fuel cell. Recalling from last time, the CO2 budget for heavy use was 4 tonnes a year. Let's say the cost is £30,000, the CO2 savings are 40 tons and the cost per ton is £760. To add to that is the extra cost of electricity over diesel etc. So this is well above our marker of £250 a ton. It's expensive carbon saving. So there has to be something else to make it attractive.

The answer lies in the comments from boaters who prize silent running, with only the gentle ripple of the water. Ironical that a significant number of boaters do the opposite and elect to run the plonky vintage

engines and thrive in their smoke rings. Both options cost money. It just goes to show that one solution doesn't fit all, and the cheapest solution is not for all either.

The half way house is the hybrid, where some part of the propulsion is provided by a diesel engine driven generator, usually rated at something like twice the cruising power driving the boat. Our normal 4 cylinder diesel engines are oversized for cruising and consequently not very efficient converters of red diesel to shaft power. In the hybrid case, the generator runs at a higher power level, and is more thermally efficient, and also runs for only part of the cruising time. So there is a fuel saving, say around 30%. This depends on what is happening with the boat. There is no point in letting the generator just 'top up' the battery bank. The battery power should be used until the battery is less than half full, and then use the diesel generator working hard, to top it up to say 95%. To get the best out of the system, it requires some behaviour change in the way to boat is used.

These higher power electrical arrangements also give the opportunity to maximise the power from solar panels, and this might give another 10% fuel reduction. Also with all these batteries and generators, it becomes possible to have an all electric boat and accommodate a much higher domestic load. So there is a real fuel and co2 saving. But at what cost? Obviously more than a simple diesel boat, because now there is an electric generator as well, and the electric motor. And don't forget the control gear. So we are talking £50000. The fuel saving is nice, but it is not going to pay for this. Similarly, the CO2 is down, but not eliminated.

So with a theoretical 30-40% fuel saving, this is not going to achieve net zero and solve the emissions problem, or pay for itself.

We are back to HVO in the simple engine as the best case. Have a hybrid at a cost if you like silent running but let's not pretend this is going to be the answer. Next time we can think about the ethics of doing nothing, using HVO or dry wood, or just buying carbon offsets.



Environment Change

By **John Sadler**

Lisa Smart asked the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether her Department made an assessment of the potential long-term impact of climate change on the canal network before reducing the level of funding for the Canal and River Trust.

Emma Hardy responded: A comprehensive review of the current grant provision to the Canal and River Trust was conducted between 2021 and 2023. The review examined a number of forward-looking scenarios using data provided by the Trust that included consideration of potential climate change impacts.

Not quite how I see it! The extra pressure that

has been put on CRT finances by having to do major work on reservoirs is nothing to do with climate change?

I suspect in truth it is a combination of climate change and apathy. We all tend to ignore reservoirs and assume that they will just be there, continuing to provide water for navigation. Well this year should have been a wake up call.

I've seen the idea of floating solar panels to reduce evaporation and generate power, obviously would require major investment but a possible way to limit the consumption of farming land for power generation.

Historic milestone for the Cotswold Canals Trust

National Lottery Heritage Fund awards £6.46m

The Cotswold Canals Connected Project is being delivered by a partnership of organisations, including Stroud District Council, Cotswold Canals Trust, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Gloucestershire County Council, and the Stroud Valleys Canal Company.

cotswoldcanals.org

The Cotswold Canals Trust is celebrating a landmark moment in its 50-year history, as The National Lottery Heritage Fund announces a £6.46 million investment to support the next phase of the Cotswold Canals Connected project—the restoration of the canal between Stonehouse and Saul, reconnecting Stroud’s historic Stroudwater Navigation to the national canal network for the first time in over 70 years.

and community activity, forming a vital ecological corridor linking habitats from east to west.

David Hagg, Chair of Trustees, Cotswold Canals Trust said “This incredible support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund marks a truly historic moment for the Cotswold Canals Trust. It brings us another step closer to realising our long-held vision—reconnecting the Stroudwater Navigation to the national canal network. This achievement is a testament to the passion, dedication, and thousands of volunteer hours contributed by our members and supporters. We are immensely proud of what has been accomplished and excited to see how this funding will help us complete the final stretch and protect the canal’s natural and industrial heritage for generations to come.”

The Stroudwater Canal will celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2029—the same year the fully restored waterway is set to reopen.

Over 350 volunteers have already contributed to the project, spanning heritage construction, ecology, and community engagement. Their commitment continues to play a vital role in bringing new life to a historic waterway and shaping a vibrant, sustainable future for the Cotswolds. John Newton, Vice Chair, Cotswold Canals Trust explained “This is a milestone moment for our volunteers, engineers, and everyone who has supported the restoration. The work already completed at Dock Lock, Oldbury Aqueduct and John



The Cotswold Canals Connected project is a true team effort, delivered in partnership by Cotswold Canals Trust, Stroud District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Canal & River Trust, and the Stroud Valleys Canal Company.

Photo: Cotswold Canal Trust.

This funding will enable the Trust, alongside its project partners, to continue delivering one of the UK’s largest and most ambitious waterway restoration schemes. The works include reinstating the ‘missing mile’—taking the canal beneath the M5 motorway—and creating a fully accessible towpath linking Stroud with Gloucester and Sharpness. The restored canal will open up new opportunities for wildlife, recreation,



Cotswold Canals Trust

Robinson Lock shows what can be achieved through teamwork and shared vision. Thanks to this new funding, we can now take the next steps towards full reconnection."

Stroudwater Canal—the historical background

Originally completed in 1779, the Stroudwater Canal stands as one of Gloucestershire's earliest and most significant industrial achievements.

Conceived and financed by local merchants and mill owners, it connected the River Severn at Saul with the market town of Stroud, providing a vital route for transporting coal, stone, and timber that powered the thriving woollen industry of the Stroud Valleys.

For more than a century, the canal served as an economic lifeline for the region's mills and workshops. Its locks, bridges, and wharfs became symbols of innovation and progress. However, with the rise of the railways in the 19th century, trade declined, and by the 1950s, much of the canal lay derelict or filled in.

In response, local volunteers formed the Cotswold Canals Trust in the late 20th century to save and restore the waterway. Through decades of dedication, they have rebuilt locks, dredged channels, repaired bridges, and revived habitats once lost to time. Today, the Stroudwater Canal forms a central part of the Cotswold Canals Connected project—a living heritage initiative that not only honours the region's industrial past but also enhances biodiversity, supports tourism, and reconnects communities to their waterways.



Get Involved

The Cotswold Canals Trust is powered by volunteers—from restoring locks and bridges to engaging communities along the towpath. Every milestone achieved is thanks to their skill and dedication.

If you'd like to make a difference, join our Western Depot team at Eastington. We're also seeking new Trustees to join the Trust in this exciting next phase of restoration.

volunteersupport@cotswoldcanals.org

CCT Volunteers John Newton and Andy Pickersgill showing Chloe Turner (Stroud District Council Leader) and Taryn Nixon (Trustee and Chair of the England, London & South Committee, Heritage Fund) our restoration sites in Eastington.

Photo: Cotswold Canal Trust.

Work in progress

Photo: Cotswold Canal Trust.



An analysis of boating in England and Wales

By **Malcolm Blundell**

This paper is about the current situation on the inland waterways of the UK, primarily England and how it has evolved and how it is perceived by those involved in the wider concept (not just boaters), including all those actors who had or are still having an influence on boating today.

It also assumes some knowledge by the reader, and although historic references will be made it is not a history lesson. Having a knowledge of this subject matter implies some involvement and therefore some bias or prejudice could occur. Where there are strong arguments for opposing views, I will outline the arguments and give some possible conclusions based upon the current political, financial and policy paradigms of those parties eg EA and CRT.

I will briefly outline some history, identify the actors involved (there are many) and how each actor has an agenda or policy with which not everyone else in the 'play' is comfortable. Using the play analogy is very apt as most boaters reading this will identify with a busy lock such as Stoke Bruerne and all the gongoozlers watching boaters going up and down the locks. Boaters are acting as unpaid historic drama actors that help the UK economy by a certain percentage that is beyond my ability to quantify. Extending the analogy, could CRT or EA be stage managers?

We all know that the canals were set up as routes to take goods or raw

materials to market or for manufacturing. They were in the main built by limited companies who may or may not have had the contract to carry the goods. Canals were built utilising the most level route from A to B and those boats carrying said goods were either to pay a charge or were employees of the owning company. Mostly the route was dictated by expediency, locks cost money but could perhaps provide a quicker route. Not much different than today's economic problems. Wealthy landowners didn't usually like a canal going across their land, but if pushed they may very well have agreed to the widening of the canal into what appeared from the great house to be a lake eg Tixall Wide or more ornate bridges as in Cassiobury Park. Narrow canals were cheaper to build but carried less per boat. In their short heyday canals were the highways of England.

The people who worked the boats had a hard life but many lived most of their lives aboard. There were some terminals and 'docks' but the term 'marina' arrived many years later. Boatyards existed, some still do today. There was no real co-ordination by canal owning companies and some compatibility issues ensued. Lock mechanisms differed, even within the same company. This still causes issues and delights some historians who know each mechanism, who designed it and its pros and cons. This does not help cash strapped 'custodians' of the canals today.

The families that worked the boats were quite isolated as the canals were workplaces. The children however had a varied playground, but the isolation and travel caused problems, (this will be revisited later). After a short heyday as we know, the canal traffic declined in favour of the railway and later trunk roads. The canals became backwaters until the mid 20th century when they were saved from closure by enthusiasts and volunteers. Pleasure boating became a pastime, initially with small boats and then with re-

furbished working boats, followed by modern welded narrowboats with decent diesel engines. As this revitalisation took place traditional boatyards created mooring space. British Waterways took over many of the canals, some marinas were built and the inland boating leisure industry was born.

Now to the actors. We will start with the largest group in the cast 'boaters'. These today come in many forms so I have tried to categorise who a boater is and what makes them a boater.

Boaters

Setting aside the definition of 'boater' as defined in both Collins and the Oxford English Dictionaries as a "Straw hat with a wide brim", boating is defined as "cruising in boats as a form of leisure". Those that formerly worked on boats were not known as boaters. Today I would argue that a boater could be categorised in the groups shown below, although they are not rigid definitions:-

Enthusiastic Boater

Someone who spends a considerable amount of spare time in the activity of boating, not just travelling but arranging or carrying out maintenance of a boat owned in whole or part or leased.

This could be a day boat, a week end cruiser, or a boat capable of cruising the whole system for an extended period of time. This person may very well have qualifications, be a member of a cruising or boating club or organisation. He/she will know at least three differing knots and know what "springing the stern" is about and how to do it. They will have a definite preference for elsan or pumpout and will pay their fees on time. The boat may have a berth in a marina or a mooring along the cut. They may even be continuous

cruisers, but not necessarily, as living on the boat is secondary to the cruising part.

Social Boater

Someone for whom boating is a social activity, this person may enjoy competition amongst boaters, sailing regattas etc.

Their boating skill may be comparable with the enthusiastic boater but it's the social aspects that are strong motivators in this person's boating. They will most likely be members of a club or organisation or be part of a wider group for whom sailing or boating is enjoyable. Most likely they will have a berth in a marina or boatyard where other social activities may take place. Cruises together are what are enjoyable to this group. Boat maintenance is also high on their agenda but not necessarily carrying it out themselves.

Weekend Boater

Very similar to both the above categories and probably the most numerous type of boating person.

Not necessarily the weekend of course, but a keen boater who has other things to deal with such as employment, so boating takes a second place. The enthusiasm is there

but the time is not. The boat will be kept close by and will most probably be small and there will be a home mooring. However, I have known one boater who trailed the boat home and back to the Thames for six weeks cruising a year during a period of leave from employment. This category could also include those enthusiastic persons who could not afford a boat and mooring so hired, leased or shared them for periods of time. Skill level is quite variable in this group. Enthusiasm here is the key, and one the marinas/boatyards are keen to take advantage of.

Not quite a boater

This category is for those who own, rent, share or hire a boat but the main reason is either as a get away, retreat, working week pad or spare sofa when the other residence isn't available (excepting those in designated residential moorings).

This group doesn't move often. Those with in-line moorings may move for water or pump out, others just for maintenance. Those without moorings of any sort will have to move on after 14 days but really don't want to. Many of this group have families or jobs that tie them to an area. Although these boats are not houseboats in that they don't always have services, those living aboard treat them as such. This group is distinguished from the last group by choice.

Forced onto boats

This group consists of those whose social, economic and familial circumstances have led them to believe that living on a boat is a cheaper form of housing.

Some have fallen into the trap of believing a narrow or wide-beamed boat in a city is cheaper than an apartment, others where family

breakup have put one partner into economic plight where a boat seems the only option. A growing number of divorced parties seem to find themselves in this category. Some in this group and the one above it are semi-resident on boats for reasons that are not quite ethical, moral or legal and the isolation from society helps them stay away from the relevant authorities. This is not something boating organisations universally condone, but is suggested by observation.

Putting boaters in the above categories, while not exact, does give an idea of the widespread individual use of boats on our inland waterways. I have not mentioned costs, licensing or mooring fees, which do cause anxiety for all the groups, not necessarily for the same reasons. Costs are not really an issue in this paper, other than of those who seek not to pay them. The allocation of costs is based upon other criteria, not the ability to pay. This may seem to readers as a glaring omission but by thinking that way they are missing out the fundamental reasons for the situation boaters find themselves in today.

After boaters...

Following boaters, the next largest group in Boating UK are the navigation authorities. There are quite a number of them but the main three are the Canal and River Trust (CRT), formerly British Waterways. The environment Agency (EA) and the Broads Authority. There are about twenty other smaller authorities, some are trusts, some companies and others are local councils.

The treatise will continue with an analysis of the structure of the distributed authority.

To be continued...

Mentions in the Houses

The continuing Saga of Waste

Lord Evans of Rainow asked His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the Canal and River Trust's decision to remove litter bins from canal towpaths on the effective management of litter on land owned by the Canal and River Trust.

Baroness Hayman of Ullock, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs responded: As an independent charity, the Canal and River Trust is responsible for operational matters on its waterways and land owned by it, including litter management.

Under section 89 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Trust has a duty to keep the land it is responsible for clear of litter and refuse. It is for the Trust to work out how best to comply with the duty, considering the standards set out in statutory Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. The Trust also has a responsibility to remove litter and fly-tipping in its canals where it would interfere with navigation.

Editor: Judging by the state of many of the disposal points that are left, CRT are failing to comply with the Environmental Protection Act 1990 that also requires that:

No person may "treat, keep or dispose of controlled waste in a manner likely to cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health", where Controlled waste is any household, industrial and commercial waste.

However CRT's less than helpful response was "CRT do not regard that they are lawfully obliged to provide facilities and thought that NABO was 'splitting hairs' by relying

on the Environmental Protection Act to maintain that they were."

Trust is providing value for money

I don't know many boaters that would agree with the Government.

Kim Leadbeater Labour, Spen Valley Asked the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of (a) funding for the Canal & River Trust to maintain and improve England's waterways and (b) the long-term funding arrangements for the Trust.

Receiving the stock answer from **Emma Hardy, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**: The Government is currently providing the Canal and River Trust with a 15-year grant (2012-2027) totalling about £740 million to support maintenance of the canal network infrastructure. When it was set up in 2012, the Government also provided the Trust with a permanent endowment fund now worth around £1 billion that generates a further quarter of its income. A review of the grant funding in 2021-2023 concluded that the Trust is providing value for money and there was a good case for continued grant funding.

A further substantial 10-year grant from 2027 of £401 million was confirmed by the Government in August 2024. This further grant reflects the importance of the country's inland waterways and continues to support the Trust in the long-standing objective of reducing its reliance on public funding while developing alternative funding sources.



Lord Evans



Baroness Hayman



Kim Leadbeater



Emma Hardy

Anderton Boat Lift

A litany of CRT responses to the continued failure of this iconic structure.

3rd January 2025

During a planned inspection, undertaken in preparation for boats to use the lift, we experienced a fault with the East river gate. The fault required further investigation and the boat lift ceased operation. Further investigation began that morning as specialist contractors assisted CRT to ensure the lift was reopened as soon as possible.

6th January 2025

We'd like to provide an update on the ongoing closure of the Anderton Boat Lift. During routine planned maintenance, a lifting wire on the East aqueduct unexpectedly failed. For safety reasons, the lift will remain closed while the cause is investigated. This involved external testing which took some time to complete. CRT noted how frustrating this would be for those affected and apologised for the inconvenience.

7th February 2025

The nature of the challenges and consequential closure of the Anderton boat lift required an investigation which had statutory requirements. The detailed assessment required investigation and evaluation by specialist engineers and was scheduled for approximately a further 6 weeks. These vital investigations are required to identify the repair and refurbishment requirements before work can be started to reopen the boat lift.

Later in February

Investigations at the Anderton Boat

Lift were progressing well, with specialist engineers continuing their detailed assessment in accordance with statutory requirements. The investigations were essential in determining the next steps needed before reopening could proceed.

14th March 2025

The engineering investigations at Anderton Boat Lift have confirmed that additional works to the gate operating mechanism were required for safe operation of the lift. Specialist engineers were urgently progressing with developing a programme to undertake the repairs needed to re-open the lift.

Following the last update, specialist engineers have continued to progress the necessary works on the Anderton Boat Lift to ensure its safe operation. As part of that, a full design review of the entire lifting system, which operates the vertical rise gates forming part of the two caisson lifts, was carried out.

CRT confirmed that the works required will take a number of months and that consequently the lift will remain out of service for the summer.

CRT acknowledged that would be disappointing for those who had already planned to, or were planning to use the boat lift this year.

1st May 2025

Over the last few weeks CRT engineers and specialists have been carrying out inspections of the structure and have now been asked to come up with several options to bring the boat lift back into service.

Each option has been carefully reviewed.

Unfortunately, CRT were unable to confirm a reopening date. When the detailed design and installation phases are decided there will be a clearer idea of when the lift can reopen. We'll continue to provide regular updates as we work to bring this vital historic structure back into operation.

23rd May 2025

As per the previous update.

29th August 2025

The CRT project team has collaborated with contractors to assess the design and cost considerations required to enhance the safety of the caisson gate lifting mechanism. This included a detailed review of associated costs and projected timescales.

24th October 2025

Unfortunately, it has been not possible to reopen the lift using the existing gate lifting system.

Trust engineers have been working closely with specialist consultants to develop a solution that will see the original rope-and-pulley mechanism replaced on all gates with a more modern, robust and safer lifting system making the lift more reliable.

The Trust has prioritised the funding required to support the detailed engineering design. However, the lift will remain closed throughout all next year 2026. CRT understands how frustrating this closure will be for boaters who regularly use this vital link between the Weaver Navigation and the rest of the Trust's network.

Editor

The above updates have been taken from CRT's alerts and include a few grammatical inaccuracies. Although



significant investment is promised, for those businesses that rely on customers reaching them from the main network the continued delay must pose an existential problem.

The Anderton Lift in 2005

Photo: Wikipedia Commons

CRT's suggested alternative:

If you are planning to travel on the Manchester Ship Canal, bookings for Ellesmere Port and Marsh Lock can be made online via our Bookings page, or by contacting our North West customer service team on 0303 0404 040.

But...

Frustratingly, both now and at the time it was published, Marsh Lock is out of action for the foreseeable future, so it's not an alternative.

There is now a plan to manually operate the gates to allow infrequent narrowboat only passages.

Boating businesses are very annoyed with CRT Business Boating section at present, losing customers all over the system not just because of short term stoppages, but no joined-up thinking when it happens.

Protect against winter downpours

Sound advice from RCR

With meteorologists predicting a mild winter—causing the atmosphere to hold more water, leading to frequent and intense rainfall events—River Canal Rescue managing director, Stephanie Horton, is advising how to protect boats against sudden downpours and changes in water levels.

Coping with floods

“Mooring ropes should be loose enough to cope with sudden changes in water levels. Check when mooring up if there are any ledges or plinths that could cause the boat to list if water levels drop. If a mooring’s at risk of flooding, run a rope to locations that can still be accessed even in a flood situation.

To stop a vessel drifting onto land when water levels rise, position a scaffold pole or poles, or a boarding plank, between the boat and the river/canal side edge and fix it into position. This acts as a mooring post, preventing flood waters from floating the boat onto land.

Consider, when mooring up, what could happen; will you need additional mooring lines (if so, rig them so you can adjust from the boat and get on and off easily)? If on a river with a strong flow, investing in chains is an option. Importantly, moor to something strong enough to hold 20 tons of boat.”

Water ingress

Alongside weather-related emergen-

cies, Stephanie reports badly-worn deck boards and leaking stern glands, blocked drain holes and rusted gas lockers are key contributors to water ingress.

“Engine bays covered by marineply deck boards are supported by a C-shaped steel channel with drain holes to collect any seeping rainwater. If the drain holes block with debris, leaves and dirt etc, water flows over the channel sides into the engine bay.

Over time, the wooden deck boards decay, creating a wider gap between them, and so the downward spiral continues; more debris falls into the channel holes and more water flows into the engine bay. Prevent this by replacing worn deck boards and clearing drainage holes.

If a stern gland leaks when the vessel is stationary, it can potentially flood the engine area. As this collar of rubber or brass forms a barrier where the propeller shaft exits the hull, it must be well-greased with tight packing. The grease should act as a seal while not in use and you can tighten it by adjusting the nut on the stern tube.

If greasing and tightening the adjust bolts fails to slow the leak, the packing may need replacing. Address this fast; a quick build-up of water will cause the vessel to sink—even if you have a bilge pump, it will soon be overwhelmed.

When the propeller shaft is turning, a stern gland should only leak a few drops a minute (dependent on



age and type). Water must circulate through the stern gland to keep it cool. If you're unsure what adjustment to make, check the stern gland temperature; if it's too hot, the packing's too tight.

Rusty areas in gas lockers can eventually allow water to leak in to the engine room; this is one of the top causes of insurance claims being rejected so ensure you check here.

Water build up in the engine bay will cause the vessel to sit lower in the water, which in turn puts shower, sink or air outlets nearer to the water level, often with devastating results.

Bilge pump

Water ingress should not be a problem if you have a bilge pump. If possible, invest in an automatic one as it's more reliable than a manual. Once left on the 'automatic' setting, its float switch dictates when it

should pump, ensuring an immediate response to water ingress. And should a leak develop from elsewhere, such as the cooling system or hull, it will keep your vessel safe. If leaving your boat for long periods, regularly check the battery.

If you have a bilge pump, install an environmentally-friendly bilge filter, such as Bilgeaway—this stops your boat pumping pollutants into the waterways and is a condition of the BSS.

Warnings against torrential rain may appear out of place, given this year we've witnessed numerous canal closures, restrictions and groundings due to low water levels, but now the tide has turned and those same waterways are starting to flood, says and as we know, climate change is leading to more extreme weather conditions which will continue to impact boating life."

Harecastle

by **Emma Purshouse**

Keepers check the levels on our roof,
make us rearrange our cargo—pushbikes
end up lying on our bed. The log pile,
collected at the threat of early winter,

is deconstructed. How low does this go?
We won't suffocate, so they say, in the fumes
of our own diesel. There are airtight gates,
an extraction fan. We pass through the portal.

Now all we have to fear is engine failure,
a drowning by the Kidsgrove boggart,
the crushing weight of millstone grit,
not seeing light at the end of the tunnel.



Emma Purshouse is an award winning writer and performer. She was a narrowboat dweller for about eight years, continuously cruising the waterways. She often uses Black Country dialect and accent in her work. For more information or to book a workshop, performance or talk, go to emmapurshouse.co.uk

Emma is also involved in the annual Wolverhampton Literature Festival which will next be held 6-8 February 2026. Entries are invited for the festival poetry competition, deadline midnight 31 December 2025. Info at www.wolvesliteraturefestival.co.uk



Harecastle was previously published in the Poetry of Staffordshire (Offa's Press)



Emma Purshouse

Photo: Nicole Lovell

The evidence is incontrovertible m'Lud

by Ian Hutson

Point your bony fingers as you will but I do think that if you have an iPad for a soul then every solution looks like a spreadsheet or an online team meeting. According to the Canal Company Ltd's latest published accounts we have increasingly fewer people who can do real, honest, physical work of the sort needed, and more and more who can handle nothing heavier than a laptop. No matter how many laptops you boot up they'll never mend a lock gate, unblock a sluice, or rebuild a bridge. It is absolutely the wrong tool.

You can't run a coal mine with two thousand school-leaver age office staff and just ten old blokes, all heading for retirement, who actually go underground with pickaxes. You can't build Austin Allegro GTi sports cars unless you have at least one or two grubby workers, and by 'workers' I mean folk who have a track record of making actual things. Even in its disastrous heyday the British Leyland Motor Corporation had more chaps on the production lines than it had in its offices.

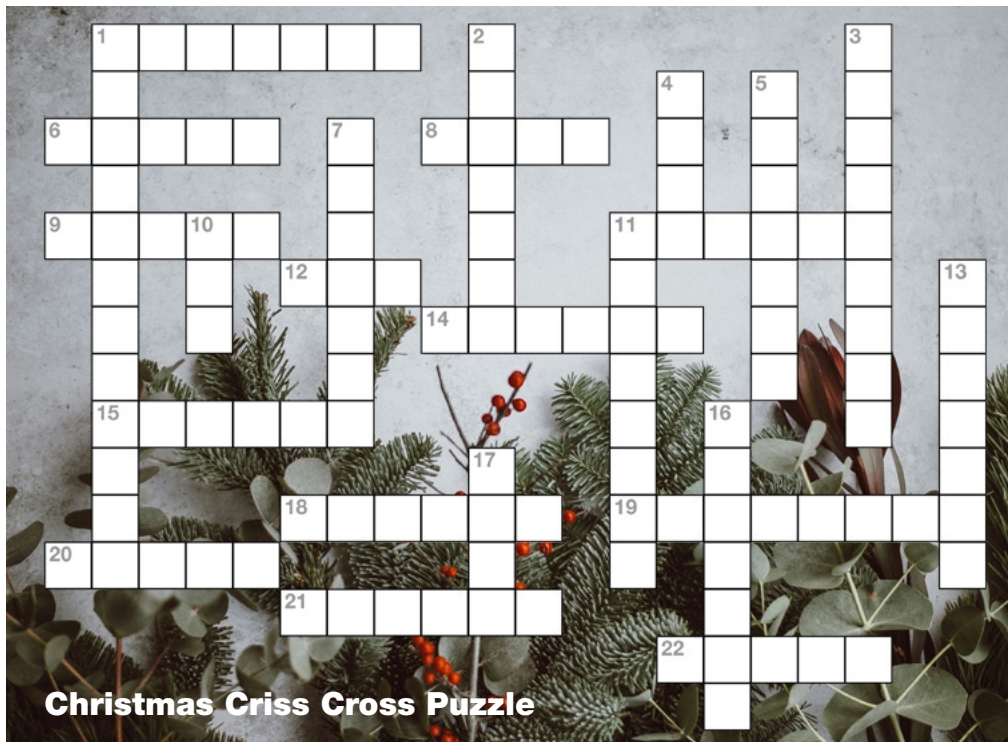
My purple prose overly-verbose point? You can't maintain an ancient canal system—even solely for the benefit of holiday hire corporations, anglers, ramblers, and the kayaking social classes—from a centrally-heated office-hours Ippdlypad. I believe that seeing deep into the heart of people, managers and even whole canal corporations is simple. Just ignore everything that they say and look instead, with care and an eye that wasn't born yesterday, at what they actually DO.

If you have an interestingly oversized management and a blindingly obviously undersized dirty fingernail "hammer, spade, and screwdriver" workforce then alarm bells ring in all of those who aren't so green as they are cabbage-looking. If you say that you are the "charity" entrusted with looking after two thousand miles of river and canal, but you keep recruiting more and more office-based staff who wouldn't know a canal even if they reversed their parents' Toyota Priapus into one, **INSTEAD** of employing manual workers then you're not in the business of maintaining a canal system. You're really doing something else entirely.

The avocado-licking demographic will scream in horror but I'm going to say it anyway. The overwhelmingly common genuine no-lies priority of most charities is the welfare of the **SENIOR** managerial level, their continued existence, their provision in matters salary, expenses, pension, and perceived peer group standing. That, and the Colgate "ring of confidence" in the old Curriculum Vitae, you know—just in case something happens. Professional professionals, convinced of their own universal usefulness, looking out for Number One.

Oh, and btw, if you contract out all of the icky horrid mucky heavy work? You're paying a third party extra money as profit **AND** admitting that you are incapable of managing the work in-house. If someone else can do the job **AND** make a profit then a more competent you could do it and save similar amounts of money in-house.





If you're not already cross about all these facility closures, you will be after attempting this! Some easy, some not so, some anagrams.

Across

- 1, 9 Sharp cut bank to bank. (7,5)
 6, 2 down, 18 Dudley's finest? (5,7,6)
 8 see 15
 9 see 1
 11, 12 Rebecca wasn't impressed. (6,3)
 12 see 11
 14 Entirely no turning allowed above these locks. (6)
 15, 8 Brand bunny. (6,4)
 18 see 6
 19 Oliver's lock? (8)
 20 Dock here where the Aire flows. (5)
 21 Not recommended to 'settle' here, push on! (6)
 22 see 16 down

Down

- 1 Harebells bet on spelling of this location. (12)
 2 see 6 across
 3 You might be in a pickle looking for services here. (9)
 4 ...and Anchor. (4)
 5 Gongoozlers galore at this fowl watering hole. (7)
 7 Mystifying lines? (7)
 10, 17 Angry bovine. (3,4)
 11 How fast can your crew reverse this? (8)
 13 Big brother of Lancaster. (7)
 16, 22 across Brass band on the common. (7,5)
 17 see 10

And here's the other closures that we couldn't squeeze in:

Hatton Top Lock; Yelvertoft; Aspley Basin; Market Drayton; Forest Middle Top Lock; Slaithwaite, Oakmore Cafe; Boston Lock; Nantwich; Hillmorton; East Wick; Lancaster.



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- ❖ Learn about the history of the local canals.
- ❖ Take a tour of historic working boats.
- ❖ Connect with charitable and community organisations.
- ❖ Participate in free activities for children.

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Down: 1 Salterhebble, 3 Braunston, 4 Hope, 5 Fradley, 7 Fazeley, 10 Red Bull, 11 Wheelock, 13 Lincoln, 16 Blowers Green

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